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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 003203

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [OVIP](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [RP](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S DINNER WITH PRESIDENT ARROYO

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. President Arroyo promised the Ambassador that her Administration would push ahead with counterterrorism efforts, especially against the ASG and JI. She will also push for new counterterrorism legislation with the Senate. She reiterated her opposition to extrajudicial killings. She welcomed senior U.S. visitors and said several high level Philippine visitors would also go to Washington. She reiterated a hope for an Oval Office call on President Bush this fall. She has not yet chosen a new envoy to Washington yet. End Summary.

¶2. (C) President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's invitation to the Ambassador for coffee on July 26 ended up as a relaxed private dinner also including National Security Advisor Norberto Gonzales and GMA personal adviser Tommy Alcantara at the Macapagal home in Forbes Park. Septel will report on economic and commercial topics.

Terrorism

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¶3. (C) President Arroyo reiterated that counterterrorism is a top priority for her Administration, with the Abu Sayyah Group (ASG) and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) as the key targets. She characterized the fight against the New People's Army (NPA) as less urgent, noting that the GRP was "still ginning up to go after the NPA," which it saw as more of a police effort. She noted that precision bombing may be needed in the campaign against JI and ASG, and predicted that new Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief of Staff General Esperon would prove effective, since he was a "fighter" and not a "desk type." She indicated her resolve to work more closely within ASEAN on counterterrorism, including energy security. She said she was working closely with her Indonesian counterpart but admitted that the GRP needed more of a concerted effort to involve Malaysia in this drive. Gonzales also highlighted the need for better intelligence sharing and for more mobility, such as the use of Cobras.

¶4. (C) Gonzales described the need more vigorously to pursue legal cases against the NPA and Communist Party of the Philippines. The Ambassador praised President Arroyo for her strong denunciation of extrajudicial killings (EJKs) in her State of the Nation Address on July 24. President Arroyo reaffirmed this position and insisted that the Philippines did not "want to be known as a nation of murderers." The Ambassador urged that the Philippine National Police's new Task Force Usig dealing with EJKs make quick and public progress on these cases, with which the President agreed. The Ambassador told the President that she would meet with new PNP chief General Calderon on July 28 to discuss this and other issues. President Arroyo pointed to successes in the AFP's Philippine Defense Reform initiative and said that the PNP was beginning its own transformational program. The

Ambassador reported to the President that a new U.S. Senior Law Enforcement Advisor would soon arrive to assist the PNP with this effort; the President indicated her satisfaction.

15. (C) The Ambassador asked the President about the prospects for passage of counterterrorism legislation now that the House and Senate were back in session. President Arroyo confirmed that this was a priority for her Administration, along with the new National Defense Act. However, she indicated that she was not yet sure whether new Senate President "Manny" Villar would prove a more reliable and effective leader than had outgoing Senate President "Frank" Drilon. "You never know with Manny," she commented. (Separately, the Ambassador met Senator Villar on July 27, and found him evasive on his legislative priorities.)

Bilateral ties  
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16. (C) The Ambassador informed President Arroyo about the upcoming visits by A/S Hill, Codel Hyde, and Codel Inouye, all of which the President welcomed enthusiastically. She said that she hoped to send a "stream" of senior Philippine visitors to Washington over the next months, possibly including Executive Secretary Ermita, chair of the GRP/MILF negotiating panel Silvestre Afable, and Foreign Secretary Romulo. She indicated that she no longer expected to attend the UNGA session in September but nonetheless wished to have the opportunity for an Oval Office call on President Bush sometime in the fall, in addition to an expected meeting at the APEC Summit in Hanoi in November. She also said that she might defer her travel to Hawaii for celebrations of the centennial of Philippine migration from September to sometime later in the year.

MANILA 00003203 002 OF 002

17. (C) President Arroyo recalled that she had sent President Bush a handwritten note thanking the U.S. for the visit of the "Mercy" hospital ship, but had not received a reply. She said she hoped her note had made it to the President.

18. (C) President Arroyo indicated that she was considering possible choices for a new Philippine Ambassador to the U.S. but had not made a decision. She expressed dissatisfaction with the way outgoing Philippine Ambassador Del Rosario had made public his differences with her Administration.  
Kenney